

Assam puts off move for forest police

By Our Correspondent

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THE formation of the proposed forest police battalion has been postponed by the Assam government owing to paucity of funds, according to Mr. Sadhidhar Rajkhowa, chief conservator of forests. He is, however, hopeful that it will be established in the near future.

The proposed battalion will not only prevent destruction of forest wealth and poaching but also evict encroachers who have occupied forest land in many areas.

Men of the battalion will be trained by the police department, but the expenditure will be met by the forest department. The annual expenditure on the force is estimated at Rs. 1.37 crores. The state government earns about Rs. 12 crores from forests annually.

ENCROACHMENTS

In an interview, Mr. Rajkhowa said large-scale encroachments had taken place in the Doyang, Number, Diphu and Rengma forests in the Golaghat sub-division, the Gohpur, Biswanath, Gali and Powa forests in the Darang district and parts of the north Lakhimpur, Cachar, south Kamrup and Haltu-gaon divisions.

He confirmed that almost all "khas" land in the neighbourhood of the Kaziranga national park was under the occupation of encroachers.

He said the forest department had suggested the creation of a reserved forest, covering several hundred hectares of "khas" land, in the vicinity of the Kaziranga Park. The proposal was yet to be approved by the government.

Encroachment and poaching are the two major threats to the flora and fauna of Assam, as elsewhere in the country.

The forest department has a force consisting of forest guards, but it is too small and ill-equipped to deal with the twin threats. The guards are not properly trained in the use of firearms and are generally armed with only lathis.

There have been several instances in which guards have fallen to poachers' bullets. Home guards have been assisting them in "policing" the forests but this has not helped solve the problem to any significant extent.

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